DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 317 931 CG 022 450

AUTHOR Reed, James R.
TITLE What Group Practicum Events Do Students Relate to Their Development as Counselors? An Exploratory Study.
PUB DATE Apr 90
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Boston, MA, April 16-20, 1990).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Counselor Attitudes; Counselor Characteristics; *Counselor Training; Experiential Learning; *Group Instruction; Higher Education; *Practicums; *Student Development; Student Reaction; Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

Group practicum classes in counselor training most commonly blend didactic information, case presentations, and interpersonal process material. This study was conducted to investigate the effect of these three classroom events on 17 students' conscious awareness of their development as counselors. Data consisted of group practicum students' responses to an open-ended short-answer survey form. These were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively: first, they were read and sorted to identify recurring themes related to counselor development, and then the protocols were coded and the resulting frequency data were submitted to a log linear analysis, in order to assess which classroom events the students were responding to with greatest frequency. Results support the conclusion that, of the three classroom events, process material seems to have had the greatest effect on the students. Qualitative analysis of the data suggest that group practicum students face four tasks as they develop as counselors: (1) overcoming fears of peer evaluation; (2) learning to use peer comments to assist in their development as counselors; (3) learning how to think like a counselor by considering the process, rather than the content, of interactions; and (4) learning to trust their own instincts as counselors. (Examples are included that illustrate these tasks. References are included.) (TE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED317091

What Group Practicum Events do Students Relate to their Development as Counselors? An Exploratory Study.

James R. Reed
Counseling Center for Human Development
University of South Florida

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
James R. Reed
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of
the American Educational Research Association
Boston, 1990

CG022450

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Most counselors can look back on their training and remember the fear and promise that their first group practicum class held for them. The class held fear because their performance would be evaluated by both their instructor and peers, but promise as well, for they were now going to see individual clients "for real." When the practicum class--a boot camp for counselors--was over, they would know that they were no longer students; they were beginning counselors.

The implicit model in such training is that a mix of didactic information, case presentations, and inter- and intrapersonal process material, relevant to the professional context, provides the enabling conditions for counselor development. Yogev (1982), for example, describes an eclectic model of counselor training that, using both individual and group supervision, integrates acquisition of practical counseling skills, cognitive knowledge of client problems, and personal awareness of counselor interpersonal feelings, behaviors, and experience.

As Holloway and Johnston (1985) note, such an instructional mix holds "an intuitive appeal" (p. 337) to counselor trainers. Holloway and Johnston (1985) observe, however, that empirical studies of the use of this model in group practica are lacking. They suggest an exploratory study to investigate the balance of didactic information, case conceptualization, and interpersonal process material that is most productive of student learning

(Holloway and Johnston, 1985). The purpose of this study is to take a first step toward such an investigation by exploring what impact these classroom events--didactic information, case conceptualization, and interpersonal process material--have on students' conscious awareness of their development as counselors.

For both methodological and ethical reasons, the study was designed to attend to the phenomenon, group supervision, in its natural environment (Holloway & Hosford, 1983), with as little intrusion as possible. The goal was, within reasonable limits, to catch students "in the act" of developing as counselors in a group practicum training context.

As a result, the study is exploratory. The data, which consist of group practicum student responses to an open-ended, short answer survey form, were analyzed in two ways. Protocols were submitted to a qualitative analysis--they were read and sorted in order to identify recurring themes related to counselor development (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). The assumption undergirding this qualitative analysis is that recurrent themes in the protocols reflect those shared features of counselor development that are prominent in student awareness. For the second, quantitative analysis, the protocols were coded and the resulting frequency data submitted to a loglinear analysis. This quantitative portion of the study is based on the

assumption that the impact of a classroom activity can be assessed if objective coders, blind to the purpose of the study, can infer from the protocols what classroom events the students were responding to.

Method

Participants. Participants for this study consisted of 17 students, 10 males and 7 females, drawn from three separate group practicum classes over a three semester period at a large midwestern university. One faculty member and two different interns from the counseling center of the university co-taught the three classes.

Of the males, 6 participants were in an MA program in counseling psychology, and 4 in a Ph.d. program in counseling psychology. Of the females, 4 were in the MA program, and 3 in the Ph.D. program. The average age for the males was 29.7 (SD = 5.52); for females, 28.4 (SD = 5.64). The average years of counseling experience for males was 4.1 (SD = 4.75); for females, 4.23 (SD = 2.06). The average number of counseling related courses taken prior to the practicum class was 4.2 (SD = 1.48) for males, and 6.6 (SD = 2.88) for females.

Collection of Data. Each practicum class met twice a week for group supervision of the individual counseling done by the students. The model for the class was explicitly the one under investigation--a mix of didactic information, weekly case presentations, and intra- and interpersonal process material. No

attempts were made to control the mix. Instead, the exact mix was determined by the judgment of the instructors and the expressed needs of the students. Data were collected for three semesters in order to limit the possibility that the findings could be attributed to procedures, events, or interactions specific to one group.

Each week of a class, at the close of a randomly selected class session for that week, the instructors made available to students a one-page, open-ended survey entitled the Personal Response Form (PRF). Completion of the PRF, which was voluntary, required describing, in writing, the events or thoughts that "stood out" for the student during the class. Of particular interest were those events and thoughts that had an impact on their awareness of themselves as counselors. Five-hundred and twelve (512) PRF's were collected.

The 512 PRF written protocols were entered into a word processor, with as much of the original spelling, punctuation, and so on, retained. Information that might identify the participants, the instructors, or clients, however, was changed. For the qualitative analysis, the protocols were read and sorted to identify a parsimonious list of recurrent themes. For the quantitative analysis, three female psychology interns, blind to the purpose of the study, were trained (to 66 per cent agreement) to code the protocols using the coding scheme described below.

Coding Schemes. As noted above, the instructional model of the instructors in the practicum class was the traditional mix of didactic, case presentation (generally though playing of audio tapes), and interpersonal process material. Thus, coders were asked to read each protocol and determine whether they could infer whether any of these classroom events had provided the stimulus for the protocol. Evidence supporting such an inference would be reference in the protocol to one of these events. The four possible event codes and their definitions are as follows:

DIDACTIC: The passage seems to be made in response to the instructor presenting informational material through lecture, structured experience, or class discussion. The following passage would be coded DIDACTIC: "The instructor described the stages of grief."

PROCESS: The passage seems to be made in response to talk or other activity that deals with intra- or interpersonal relationships of the group members. The following passage would be coded PROCESS: "We discussed how we were afraid to evaluate each other's counseling work."

TAPE: The passage seems to be made in response to a group member's playing a tape of a counseling session or discussing a particular client. The following passage would be coded TAPE: "The feedback to the student about his tape focused on his desire to protect his client from the pain of his breakup with his lover."

OTHER: The passage seems to be made in response to some event not listed above, or, no inference can be made about what event provided the stimulus for the protocol. The following passage would be coded OTHER: "I'm beginning to understand what Rogers meant by unconditional positive regard."

In order to assess the relevance of the protocol to the participants' developing sense of themselves as counselors, the coders also coded the general topic, or focus, of the protocol. The focus codes were selected through a rational analysis of the dominant persons in the group practicum context: self, group members, or clients. The definition of the focus codes are as follows:

SELF: The passage refers to private or public actions of the author of the comment. The following passage would be coded SELF: "I heard the other student's tape and realized that I would not have been able to handle the client's anger."

GROUP: The passage refers to inferred private or observable public actions of members of the group or the group as a whole. The following passage would be coded GROUP: "We seem to discount student A whenever she makes a comment about what she sees going on in the class."

CLIENT: The passage refers to those persons who are recognized by the group as receiving psychological treatment from the group members. The following passage would be coded CLIENT: "My client seems to want me to be both a friend and a professional."

OTHER: The passage seems to be about some focus not listed above. The following passage would be coded OTHER: "My mother would like this class."

Because a protocol may have multiple foci, coders also used combinations of two of the focus codes. Therefore, six focus codes are possible for any protocol: SELF, GROUP, CLIENT, SELF and CLIENT, SELF and GROUP, and OTHER.

Analysis of Data. As noted above, the qualitative analysis was performed by a repeated reading and sorting of the protocols. The findings will be discussed in the Results and Discussion sections. For the quantitative analysis, all 512 protocols were coded by two coders; one coded only 494 protocols. The codings of the protocols were first analyzed for interrater agreement. Interrater agreement was selected because the coding schemes were categorical scales (Tinsley & Weiss, 1975).

Next, the 4 X 6 X 3 contingency table, formed by cross-classifying coding frequencies of the 4 event and 6 focus codes by the 3 coders, was analyzed using a computerized loglinear analysis (StatSoft, 1988). The goal of a log linear analysis is

to derive from the observed cell frequencies of a usually multidimensional contingency table an adequate yet parsimonious description of how the data are distributed (Tracey, Sherry, Bauer, Robins, Todara, & Briggs, 1984). Because the test statistic used, the maximum-likelihood Chi^2 (G^2), can be decomposed in a manner that parallels how the total sum of squares is decomposed in an ANOVA, interactions between variables can be evaluated (Marascuilo & Busk, 1987). Details of the log linear analysis are discussed with the presentation of the results.

Results

Interrater agreement. Because of the exploratory nature of this study, a 2 out of 3, or 66 per cent agreement rate, was chosen. Two of the three coders agreed on 89 per cent of the event codes and on 83.4 per cent of the focus codes. Two of the three also matched event and focus codes on 42.2 per cent of the codings. As a further check on interrater agreement, the loglinear analysis included coders as a variable. As noted in Table 1 (which will be discussed in detail later), coders are homogeneous. That is, the coders do not differ from each other in how they performed the task. The analysis, however, provides no information about the validity of the codings. Table 1 also indicates that coders and focus codes interact. The interaction of focus and coder appears because (a) coder 2 used the focus

code OTHER more than coders 1 and 3, and (b) coder 1 coded fewer protocols using the combination focus codes than did coders 2 and 3. The interrater agreements, although not overwhelming, were considered strong enough to warrant further analysis of the data.

Log linear analysis. Identifying a model that best fits the data was accomplished using a backwards elimination procedure (Goodman, 1971). An initial, saturated model, with all two way interactions, event X focus, event X coder, and focus X coder, was derived. Then, in stepwise manner, each interaction effect was removed and the new, more parsimonious model, was tested using the maximum likelihood ratio, G^2. Models that differed significantly from that data, indicated by a G^2 significant at $p < .10$, were rejected. Using the rule of thumb to accept a model in which p is roughly equivalent to the degrees of freedom (Marascuilo & Busk, 1987), the best fitting model was one in which Event and Focus interacted, and focus and coder interacted ($G^2 = 40.80$; $df = 36$; $p = .27$).

As noted earlier, G^2 can be decomposed in a manner that parallels the decomposition of the total sum of squares in ANOVA. Two tests of significance are generally performed: tests of unconditional, or marginal, association, and tests of conditional, or partial, association, which are adjusted by subtracting the G^2 value or values associated with confounding

interactions (Marascuilo & Busk, 1987). As noted in Table 1, which presents the decomposition of G^2, the tests lead to the same conclusions, as follows:

(a) Event codes are not homogeneous.

(b) Focus codes are not homogeneous.

(c) Coders are homogeneous.

(d) Event and focus codes interact.

(e) Event codes and Coder are independent.

(f) Focus codes and Coder are interact.

Discussion

Results from the quantitative analysis support the conclusion that, of the three classroom events considered in this study, process material seems to have the most impact on students. Table 2, made by cross classifying event and focus codes, indicates that the event code PROCESS accounts for 33.7 percent of all codings, whereas DIDACTIC codes account for 9.7 per cent and TAPE codes acccunt for 10.9 per cent.

The impact of the process material, however, is diffuse. Table 3 presents a ranking of the event by focus codes in which 5 per cent or more of the protocols are found. In Table 3, process material appears related equally to a focus on client (11.7 per cent of all codings) and a focus on self and group (11.5 per cent of all codings), then to a focus on self (7.8 per cent of all codings).

The results also support the conclusion that group practicum students are responding to much more than just classroom events as they develop as counselors. As noted in Table 2, 45.7 per cent of all codings received the event code OTHER, which was used for those protocols for which the coders could not infer the antecedent classroom event. In addition, as found in Table 3, events coded OTHER are related to a focus on self in 24.8 per cent of all codings and to a focus on OTHER in 10.1 per cent of all codings.

These conclusions suggest that the manner in which group practicum students use the classroom events to aid in their development as counselors is complex and multifaceted. The qualitative analysis of the protocols supports this argument. As students develop, they appear to think in global, not specific terms. For example, they do not evaluate their development as counselors by identifying specific skills they have mastered; rather, they note how they are becoming counselors though their use of a particular method for approaching human interaction.

Based on the qualitative analysis of the protocols, group practicum students face roughly the following four tasks as they develop as counselors:

(a) Overcoming fears of being evaluated by their peers.

(b) Learning how to use comments from their peers to assist them in their development as counselors.

(c) Learning how to think like a counselor by considering the process, rather than the content, of human interactions.

(d) Learning to trust their own "instincts" as counselors.

Several examples from the protocols will be used to illustrate these tasks.

Practicum students must deal with their fears of being evaluated by their peers, especially when playing their tapes. Several examples demonstrate the students' concern for risking exposure as incompetent counselors:

> I realized that it's difficult for me to feel comfortable allowing others to critique my work, although I realize that it's necessary.

> Playing tape of session for group. I tend to expect too much out of myself as a beginning student. Questioned ability and skills as student. Embarrassed at playing tape.

> I need to relax a little bit and not expect to know everything about counseling. Nobody knows everything. We all help each other along.

The last protocol above also indicates another task facing the students--learning how to use each other to help promote their own professional growth. In learning this, the students learn to challenge their own ideas and preconceptions, as the following protocol indicates:

> It may be more important in my growth to listen to the opinions of others than to express my own opinion. I have not been using opportunities as I could to understand the perspectives others make on clients.

In addition, students accomplishing this task are beginning to relax their rigidly held notions of how to do counseling, as the following protocol demonstrates:

> I learned that we all see client issues and concerns from different vantage points, and that there is no wrong or right way. My ideas are just as valuable as other practicum students. The way I was checking out client's feelings was okay. I also learned that my fear about playing tapes is ridiculous; that's the only way I'm going to learn to be a better counselor.

The third, crucial task is for students to adopt a process focus. Those that do so begin thinking of themselves as counselors. For example, in this protocol the student describes discovering a new way of responding as a counselor:

> Not feeling well; I sat back and focused on the process rather than the content. I was surprised at how different my focus was while I was focusing on process rather than content. I learned something about my versatility as a counselor--ability to focus on process as well as content.

Others become aware of this change from a content to a process focus after it happens:

> My orientation towards helping people is changing. I am becoming much more open, process oriented, accepting, and patient.
>
> From the group talk, I'm gaining awareness of my rigidity and learning how to allow intimacy to develop. I have become more conscious of process.

A significant means for developing this process focus is by applying the "process" method to themselves. That is, students begin thinking about themselves the way they will think about their clients, as these protocols demonstrate:

> Realizing that unless I am willing to go to the scary places/feelings where my clients are I will not be able to achieve understanding/empathy. Thus, if I am afraid of the neurosis in me and am unaware of this it will be difficult to be in touch with those feelings and experiences of the client.
>
> As I learn how to regulate my own boundaries at a more complex level, I can assist my clients in regulating theirs.
>
> The things I learned about myself (that I don't like all my clients, I look for personal rewards in sessions, and that I want all my clients to like me) are not things I feel like bragging about, but I think they're important things to know about myself as I grow as a counselor.

Finally, practicum students begin relaxing, trusting their own reactions rather than focusing on the "right" way to counsel:

> I learned that I ought to trust my inner feelings in my decisions and interactions with my clients.
>
> Trust my gut feelings in counseling, the same as I do in life.
>
> I learned that there are times when all different aspects of my personality may be appropriate in the counseling situation. What I mean by that is that there is no part of me which I feel I should hold back at all times believing that it will never be appropriate in a counseling situation.

In brief, the process of developing as a counselor requires that students begin treating themselves in a particular way: they are accepting, permissive, but questioning. It is this method, one which focuses on the process of human interaction, rather than mastery of a specific skills, that group practicum students note when they write about their own sense of their development as counselors. As one student put it,

> I've learned so much! At this point in my life, I want to keep doing this. I like the people I'm with, the work I am doing. It feels very meaningful to me and I am good at it and have the potential to get a lot better. It is really strange, unsettling, exciting to be in a profession that generates more questions than answers.

A focus on process material in the group practicum class appears to promote the conscious development of this open, but questioning, attitude that is central to the doing of counseling.

Of course, as with all exploratory studies, this study is beset by problems. First, the protocols were collected at one practicum site, with one primary instructor. How the results may reflect the impact of factors unique to this setting are unknown. Second, the interrater agreement is not substantial, warranting only cautious interpretations of the results of the loglinear analysis. Third, because the base rate of didactic information, case conceptualization, and interpersonal process material in the classes is unknown, it is not clear whether the differential impact of process material reflects merely its differential rate of occurrence. Fourth, the demand characteristics of the PRF, which asked students what stood out for them and how this was relevant to their own sense of their development as a counselor, may have biased the data in favor of statements with a focus on self. If this is so, then the high number of protocols coded with a focus code of SELF is spurious. Fourth, 27.8 per cent of the estimated frequencies in the cross classification table

submitted to log linear analysis are less than 5; as a result, Type I error rates are likely inflated (Marascuilo & Busk, 1987). Finally, as to the post hoc reading of the protocols, a different reader may have found different themes.

The results, however, do provide findings that, to use the words of the student quoted above, "generate more questions." For example, a more rigorous replication of the study, but with the inclusion of evaluation data on student progress, could help answer the questions (a) whether the "good" students are the ones who catch on to the "process" focus of counseling and (b) whether process material in the class facilitates accomplishing this task. In addition, an experimental study in which amount of process material is varied would begin clarifying the optimum balance of process material with didactic and case presentation material. From a different angle, descriptive studies could also investigate how group practicum teachers decide what mix of didactic information, case conceptualization, and interpersonal process material to present to students. If this implicit training model retains its popularity, as is likely, then such studies are long overdue.

References

Goodman, L. A. (1971). The analysis of multidimensional contingency tables: Stepwise procedures and direct estimation methods for building models for multiple classifications. Technometrics, 13, 33-61.

Holloway, E. L., & Hosford, R. E. (1983). Towards developing a prescriptive technology of counselor supervision. Counseling Psychologist, 11, 73-77.

Holloway, E. L., & Johnston, R. (1985). Group supervision: Widely practiced but poorly understood. Counselor Education and Supervision, 24, 332-340.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Marascuilo, L. A., & Busk, P. L. (1987). Loglinear models: A way to study main effects and interactions for multidimensional contingency tables with categorical data. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 34, 443-455.

Reynolds, H. T. (1984). Analysis of nominal data. Sage University Paper series on Quantitative Applications in the Social Sciences, series no.07-700. Beverly Hills and London, Sage.

StatSoft (1988). Complete statistical system [Computer program]. Tulsa, OK: Author.

Taylor, S. J., & Bogdan, R. (1984). Introduction to qualitative research methods: The search for meanings (2nd ed.). New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Tinsley, H.E.A., & Weiss, D.J. (1975). Interrater reliability and agreement of subjective judgments. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 22, 358-376.

Tracey, T. J., Sherry, P., Bauer, G. P., Robins, T. H., Todara, L., & Briggs, S. (1984). Help-seeking as a function of student characteristics and program description: A logit-loglinear analysis. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 31, 54-62.

Yogev, S. (1982). An eclectic model of supervision: A developmental sequence for beginning psychotherapy students. Professional Psychology, 13, 236-243.

Table 1

Decomposition of G2 According to a Full-Factorial Model on Event, Focus, and Coder

Source of Variation	df	Conditional tests G^2	p	Unconditional tests G^2	p
Event (E)	3	573.02	.00	573.02	.00
Focus (F)	5	644.59	.00	644.59	.00
Coders (C)	2	.42	.81	.42	.81
E x F	15	622.75	.00	618.02	.00
E x C	6	9.60	.14	4.87	.56
F x C	10	201.78	.00	197.06	.00

Table 2

Event by Focus Percent of Total Protocols

	EVENT				
Focus	Other	Didactic	Process	Tape	TOTAL
Other	10.1	4.2	.9	2.4	17.6
Self (S)	24.8	2.8	7.8	3.1	38.5
Client (C)	2.6	1.4	11.7	3.1	18.8
Group (G)	3.4	.5	.9	.4	5.1
S & C	3.6	.4	.8	.2	5.0
S & G	1.3	.4	11.5	1.7	15.0
TOTAL	45.7	9.7	33.7	10.9	100.0

Table 3

Ranking of the Event by Focus codings used with Greater than 5 Per Cent of the Total Number of Protocols

Event	Focus	Per Cent
Other	Self	24.8
Process	Client	11.7
Process	Self & Client	11.5
Other	Other	10.1
Process	Self	7.8
		65.9 TOTAL